

# Bitterroot AUDUBON



MAY 2023

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 37, NO. 9

## Wild Skies Raptor Center

By Kate Stone

Many of us have encountered an injured bird or even helped rescue or transport an injured bird to care. Here in the Bitterroot Valley, injured raptors make their way north to Wild Skies Raptor Center, located in Potomac, MT. I first met Executive Director Brooke Tanner on a rescue mission for a Vaux's Swift nest in a chimney in Missoula. Over time and with many more shared rescue experiences under my belt, I was impressed enough with her work that I joined the Wild Skies Raptor Center board.



*Courtesy Wild Skies Raptor Center  
Brooke Tanner from releases a Red-Tailed  
Hawk after a successful rehabilitation.*

Wild Skies has been rehabilitating raptors in western Montana for the last thirteen years. They admit over 100 birds annually, with about 40% coming from the Bitterroot Valley. Most intakes involve a human conflict of some sort, including vehicle, fence, and window collisions, cat attacks,

poisoning, or shooting. Now we are navigating the occurrence of avian flu, which is often fatal to raptors. In the last several years, Wild Skies has expanded their volunteer network in the Bitterroot Valley, and several Bitterroot Audubon members lend their hands to help with captures and transport and even help on work projects at the facility in Potomac.



*Courtesy Wild Skies Raptor Center  
Saffron the Long-eared Owl is one of several  
education birds Wild Skies Raptor Center cares  
for. You can "adopt" Saffron or other raptors on  
the Wild Skies website.*

Bitterroot Audubon has made numerous donations to support the work of Wild Skies, and we encourage our members to do the same. We've offered financial assistance to cover mileage, food and other supplies for rehab and education birds, education programs for people of all ages in the valley, lead testing for eagles, and most recently, to help Wild Skies build a much-needed security fence.

If you have the following items and would be willing to donate them to Wild Skies, please bring them to our May program.

- Used towels and sheets in usable condition
- Rubber gloves and face masks
- Cleaning brushes and sponges
- Gas cards
- Pet carriers (all sizes – need to be clean and in good condition)

If you'd like to learn more about raptors in the Bitterroot Valley, please join Brooke Tanner and Jesse Varnado from Wild Skies Raptor Center to meet some of their ambassador birds and hear their rehab stories. They will also talk about current issues in raptor rehabilitation.

This Bitterroot Audubon program will take place on **Monday, May 15<sup>th</sup> at 7pm in person on the lawn of the Lee Metcalf National Wildlife Refuge Visitor's Center, at 4567 Wild Fowl Lane in Stevensville, MT.** Feel free to bring a blanket or portable chair to sit on. If we by chance have inclement weather, we will move the program inside. And if you'd like to be social, consider arriving at 6 pm to bird the ponds and wetlands near the Visitor's Center.



*Courtesy Kate Stone  
Bitterroot Audubon members Bill and Becky Peters  
examine raptor feathers while on a field trip to Wild  
Skies Raptor Center.*

## AWESOME HIGHWAY CLEANUP

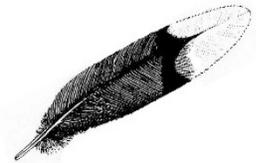
*By Skip Horner*

Our semi-annual highway cleanup will take place on Tuesday, May 30<sup>th</sup> 2023, at 4PM. We'll meet and park on the west side of Bell Crossing and clean miles 60 to 62 north and south from there. Bitterroot Audubon's name is on those big highway signs, so come out and help us, and the highway, look good. Bring your own gloves. We'll supply high-visibility vests and stout plastic bags. Questions? Call Skip at 406-369-5367. Thanks!

## Letter from the President

*By Micki Long, BAS President*

Since I last wrote this column, spring has finally acted like spring! As we all know, spring symbolizes renewal, new life. Some years I need to feel Nature's promise of rebirth. I don't even want to think, this morning, of all the daunting challenges facing the trees, mountains, streams, and wildlife I love. Instead, I want to focus on the breeding pairs I see or hear in my yard, on walks, and during any outside adventure: Steller's Jays, Clark's Nutcrackers, American Dippers, Pileated Woodpeckers, American Robins, Wild Turkeys, and Great Horned Owls.



*Courtesy Micki Long*

Yesterday, I saw Red-tailed Hawk nestlings who have nearly outgrown their nest, a young Bald Eagle being fed by parents, and Canada Geese goslings swimming with their parents. This spring and last, my family has suffered painful losses, and I've really needed the solace I almost always find in Nature.

Coincidentally, one of my daughters asked me to look over William Wordsworth's famous poem, "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." I had not read it in years; there is so much going on in the poem. But in some lines, Wordsworth beautifully evokes Nature's power:

for she [Nature] can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings. (126-135)

Some of the adventures that inspire and soothe me involve breeding pairs of Peregrine Falcons. I volunteer for Bitterroot Audubon's Raptor Guardians/Peregrine Watch program. The friend who monitors Peregrines with me and I, weighed down by scopes and tripods, have slogged through trails still deep in snow in mid- and late April. But we are rewarded with incredible views, breeding pairs of Peregrines, and the exhilaration and joy that come when surrounded by mountain peaks and rushing rivers. I am so grateful for these experiences.



*Courtesy Sophie Osborn*

I hope to see you all in person at this month's program or maybe at Montana Audubon's birding festival, Wings Across the Big Sky, in Great Falls June 9-11 (<https://mtaudubon.org>). As this is my last Letter until September, I want to wish you all a wonderful spring and summer full of great hikes; wildflowers; and, of course, birds!

## Calendar of Events

- Monthly:** Beginner Bird Walk at Lee Metcalf NWR, 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month, Stevensville, MT 10AM-12PM.
- May 13:** Skalkaho Bend planting; 10AM-1PM, 1-4PM. See article for details.
- May 15:** Audubon Meeting/Program: *Wild Skies Raptor Center* with Brooke Tanner and Jesse Varnado; Audubon Meeting, Audubon Meeting, Lee Metcalf NWR, Stevensville, MT 7PM, Board Mtg. 5PM.
- May 30:** Highway Clean-up, 4PM, see announcement in this newsletter.
- June 9-11:** Wings Across the Big Sky Festival—Save the Date. See article for details.

### Calling Volunteers to Plant a 60' Native Wildflower Garden at Skalkaho Bend Park on Saturday, May 13<sup>th</sup>!!

*By Becky Peters*

So many of you have already helped BAS and Bitter Root Land Trust to plant native shrubs and to seed native wildflowers at SBP (and then to weed around them!) Thank you so much!! I hope that you have visited the park to see your achievements! Some of the wildflowers have made it through the winters! Those were the first steps, now for the next step. With the help of BAS, Bitter Root Water Forum, and the City of Hamilton we are going to plant a 60'x5' Pollinator Garden at the Skalkaho Bend Park. It will take years to get it established but the community will enjoy the results for many years to come.

Join us on **Saturday, May 13<sup>th</sup>**. Bring your garden gloves, some garden tools (labeled with your name) and a willingness to get dirty. Some of you may be weeding to help with past year's plantings and some of you may be getting the ground ready, planting the new forbs, or shoveling the mulch. There will be snacks and water there for you and please bring whatever you need to be comfortable.

We will have one shift from **10 AM-1 PM** and another shift from **1-4 PM**.

Please email me, Becky Peters, at [rpeters@montana.com](mailto:rpeters@montana.com) Subject line: Planting! Let me know which shift you would like. Bring your grandkids, your kids, whomever! Bitterroot Audubon loves to have families involved.

The location of the park is 505 Bailey Ave, Hamilton. There is plenty of parking and an outhouse there (with hand sanitizer!!!).

You may ask “Why are pollinator gardens so important to a bird organization like Audubon?” For the answer, please take a look at the next article.



*Courtesy Doug Tallamy*

## Why are Pollinator Gardens so Important for our Birds?

*By Becky Peters*

“Chickadees will collect more than 500 caterpillars a day to feed their young chicks enough nutrients in order to thrive.” So here are some important points from National Audubon about why we should plant native wildflower gardens—because **Native Plants are Better for Birds.**

More native plants mean more choices of food and shelter for native birds and other wildlife. To survive, native birds need native plants and the insects that have co-evolved with them. Most landscaping plants available in nurseries are exotic species from other countries. Many are prized for qualities that make them poor food sources for native birds—like having leaves that are unpalatable to native insects and caterpillars. With 96 percent of all terrestrial bird species in North America feeding insects to their young, planting insect-proof exotic plants is like serving up plastic food. No insects? No birds.

### Here are some possible impacts of a native plant garden:

- **557:** Varieties of butterflies and moths supported by native oak trees, as compared to only **5** butterfly and moth species supported by non-native ginkgo trees.
- **96:** Percentage of land birds that rely on insects to feed chicks.
- **1,200:** Number of crops that depend on pollinators to grow.
- **40 million:** Acres of lawn in the U.S. currently.
- **80 million:** Pounds of pesticides applied to lawns in the U.S. annually. Native plants, on the other hand, support a balance of predator and

prey and thrive without pesticides. (Did you know that some pesticides stay in the ground for 7 years and keep on poisoning our birds?)

- **800 million:** Gallons of gas used annually by lawn mowers. This produces significant amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases driving climate change.

### And here’s just some of the USFS’ information about planting native wildflowers:

#### *Why Garden with Native Wildflowers?*

Native plants are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions where they naturally occur. These important plant species provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, insects, birds, and other animals. Unlike natives, common horticultural plants do not provide energetic rewards for their visitors and often require insect pest control to survive.

#### **Native plants are also advantageous, because:**

- Native plants do not require fertilizers and require fewer pesticides than lawns.
- Native plants require less water than lawns and help prevent erosion.  
The deep root systems of many native plants increase the soil's capacity to store water. Native plants can significantly reduce water runoff and, consequently, flooding.
- Native plants help reduce air pollution.  
Native plantscapes do not require mowing. Excessive carbon from the burning of fossil fuels contributes to global warming. Native plants sequester, or remove, carbon from the air.
- Native plants provide shelter and food for wildlife. (that’s our birds!)
- Native plants promote biodiversity and stewardship of our natural heritage.
- Native plants are beautiful and increase scenic values!

### So why not start your own pollinator garden with native wildflowers this May??

#### *Links for Further Information:*

- Montana Native Plants:  
<https://mtnativeplants.org/native-plant-landscaping/>
- Forest Service:  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/wildflowers/links>
  - Activities for Kids:  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/kids/activities/>

[index.shtml](#)

- Audubon:

<https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>

Enter your zip code to find native plants for birds with Audubon's native plants data base:

<https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/why-native-plants-are-better-birds-and-people>

## Bitterroot Audubon Volunteer Opportunities

By Micki Long, BAS President

### One-time or short-term opportunities:

- Semi-Annual Highway Cleanup
- Helping birders at annual Welcome Back Waterfowl Day
- Tabling one or more times at O'Hara Farmers Market
- Tabling at Teller Youth Expo
- Tabling at various, one-time events
- Participating in one of our Christmas Bird Counts
- Helping plant, water, and maintain pollinator plants at Skalkaho Bend Park
- Coordinating refreshments at in-person meetings

### Recurring opportunities

- Serving on a standing committee (\*Programs, Education, Scholarship, Field Trips, \*Conservation/Important Bird Area, Social) \*key committees that need one or more volunteers
- Monitoring Peregrines and other Raptors in the Raptor Guardian/Peregrine Watch
- Participating in the 2023 Chapter-wide Big Year Challenge

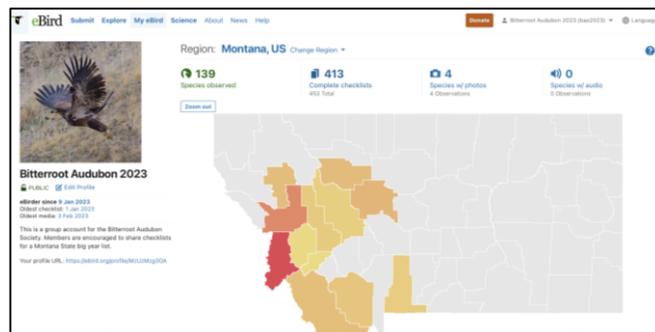
### Long-term opportunities

- Serving on Bitterroot Audubon's Board
- Developing and coordinating a junior/youth group
- Serving as a Chapter Delegate to Montana Audubon's Board
- Assisting with and then sharing responsibility for the Bitterroot Audubon newsletter.

## Bitterroot Audubon Big Year 2023 Update

By Micki Long, BAS President

Here is what our BAS2023 Big Year eBird count looks like today, April 27<sup>th</sup>:



I intended to pose frequent challenges for eBirders participating in this Big Year. I haven't been very good at that! Here are a couple of new ones:

- 1) Note on your eBird checklist when you see a species for the first time this year by typing "FOY" under "Add details about this observation" for the relevant species. Or use the green "+" sign on the far bottom left of your mobile screen to add comments at any time during your birding trip. You can even add comments just before you submit the list, under "Add Checklist Comments." Just indicate the species and type "FOY."
- 2) Listen for at least 15 minutes at dawn or dusk; it might really be interesting to do this a few days in a row to see if different species are singing or calling, particularly if the weather is different on those days.

The number of species is growing faster now, as more migrating birds arrive. It's not too late to join in the count (actually, it's not too late until 2023 is over). Help our chapter post an eBird checklist for every county in the state! All you need to do is share your eBird checklists with BAS2023. Questions? Email me at [mickilong@gmail.com](mailto:mickilong@gmail.com).



## Sneed Collard III to Present at Wings Across the Big Sky 2023!

Montana's premier birding festival, organized by Montana Audubon and this year's local host chapter, Upper Missouri Breaks Audubon June 9-11, 2023

Registration opens in mid-April. Stay tuned for more information.

Heritage Inn, Great Falls, Montana

[www.mtaudubon.org](http://www.mtaudubon.org)

Our keynote speaker for the festival is acclaimed author, Sneed B. Collard III, who has written more than ninety books for young people. Sneed is a

popular award-winning speaker and has spoken at numerous birding festivals and events. During the presentation, Sneed will recount the entertaining adventures behind his humorous, award-winning memoir *Warblers and Woodpeckers: A Father-Son Big Year of Birding* (Mountaineers, 2018) and other bird books and articles. Along the way, participants will travel to some of America's best birding hotspots as well as South America, the

Galápagos, and the Middle East. Sneed will share highlights of his son's and his "accidental Big Years" of 2022 starring Pinky, America's most famous flamingo.

To learn more about Sneed, visit his websites [www.sneedcollardiii.com](http://www.sneedcollardiii.com) and [www.FatherSonBirding.com](http://www.FatherSonBirding.com).



*Courtesy Kate Stone*

*Bob and Judy Hoy joined the throngs at Lee Metcalf NWR for Bitterroot Audubon's Welcome Back Waterfowl Day.*



Bitterroot Audubon's

# BIG YEAR

2023

Let's see how many total species our chapter members see **in Montana** from 1/1/23 until 12/31/23.

We'll count by using eBird and sharing our lists to a group eBird account.

Eric Rasmussen will present a workshop on using eBird for beginners or those who need a refresher, on Jan.9 at 3 p.m.

You must register in advance for this workshop:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlvf-mrrzlsHtMr0etOS9Wcm06xfO\\_GEtAC](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZlvf-mrrzlsHtMr0etOS9Wcm06xfO_GEtAC)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the workshop.

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Vice-Pres.	Mike Daniels*	
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\* Board Member

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**WEBSITE:** [www.BitterrootAudubon.org](http://www.BitterrootAudubon.org)

**INSTAGRAM:** @bitterroot\_audubon  
and on Facebook!

### Chapter Only Membership

The Bitterroot Audubon Chapter Only Membership is \$15/year. These members will be supporting local chapter activities, receive the full color e-newsletter, and enjoy Chapter benefits. To join as a Chapter Only Member, complete this form.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_  
State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Send this application with \$15 to:



Bitterroot Audubon Society  
PO Box 326  
Hamilton, MT 59840-0326

### NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION



Renew or Sign up  
for your  
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[Audubon.org](http://Audubon.org)